

STATEMENT

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BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WASHINGTON, D.C.

“Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request for the Federal Emergency Management Agency”

Submitted  
By  
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April 18, 2023

## **Opening**

Chairman Joyce, Ranking Member Cuellar, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today to discuss FEMA's Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 \$30.2 billion total appropriations request.

As our nation continues to face an unprecedented number of complex and catastrophic disasters, the field of emergency management has never been more critical. We must be ready to act at any moment. Now, more than any previous time in history, emergency managers must be adaptable and ready to execute the fundamentals of emergency management as the disaster mission evolves. Concurrently, we must continue to assess our programs and resources to ensure they are meeting the needs of our citizens they serve.

FEMA is committed to providing the support our states, tribes, territories, and communities need as they recover from both natural and human-induced disasters, incidents, and events. Between 2016 and 2022, FEMA experienced a 124 percent increase in the number of staff who deployed to support disaster operations for more than 30 days. In 2022 alone, FEMA performed recovery work during 52 major disaster declarations, with employees spending an average of 95 days on deployment serving our communities and citizens firsthand. A recent example is FEMA partnering with the New Mexico state and local partners to establish the Hermit's Peak/Calf Canyon Claims Office. Congress directed FEMA to stand up an office that would disburse funding and ensure a simple and timely claims process for the citizens and businesses as they recovered from a devastating wildfire.

As you know, following a disaster, FEMA serves both individual survivors and communities through our individual and public assistance programs. In 2022, FEMA provided more than \$3.2 billion directly to disaster survivors and more than \$30 billion to support the rebuilding and repair of community infrastructure following disasters. The Agency also continues to provide operational support in collaboration with our federal partners at the southern border.

The FY 2024 President's Budget request will provide the resources the Agency needs to meet its mission of helping people before, during, and after disasters. FEMA's budget request is closely aligned to support three overarching goals outlined in the 2022-2026 FEMA Strategic Plan. These goals are to: 1) instill equity as a foundation of emergency management; 2) lead the whole of community in climate resilience; and 3) promote and sustain a ready FEMA and a prepared nation. Our budget request directly reflects our continued commitment to fulfill our mission, while also effectively managing our resources. Additionally, our request promotes our ability to coordinate mitigation, response, recovery, and preparedness missions while also equipping a highly skilled and competent workforce who are ready at any moment to provide on-the-ground support to our communities.

## **Instill Equity as a Foundation of Emergency Management**

Disasters affect everyone differently and make existing challenges in communities and the lives of survivors more difficult.

One of my priorities to ensure we're putting people first is partnering with our state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) communities to instill equity as a foundation of emergency

management. Some of the ways we accomplish this is through the Agency's enhanced Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) direct technical assistance and by improving program access through all of our mitigation grant programs. These programs will provide our communities access to effective and efficient tools to assist in their recovery and resilience efforts. These capabilities will expand our outreach to states, local communities, Tribal Nations, and territories and address new climate risks, promote risk mitigation and avoidance, and improve accessibility for our socially vulnerable populations.

We also recognize that under-resourced communities experience differences in preparing for and recovering from disasters. Further, they tend to face greater obstacles in resuming a new normal way of life immediately following a disaster. Our budget request reflects these considerations throughout the agency's programs, and I'll highlight a few examples.

FEMA's request includes \$6.6 million to continue building climate resilience in the nation's disadvantaged communities through making our flood insurance products more accessible to our customers; building climate resilience in disadvantaged communities through our grant outreach and technical assistance programs; and enhancing our flood mitigation assistance program. For example, \$1.8 million will be used to enhance our customer experience through a more streamlined, user-friendly digital platform that will reduce the amount of time our customers require to complete and submit requests for grants and public assistance. This digitized platform will aid in the removal of barriers to, and usage of, these programs by underserved communities.

In our country, disaster-related floods on average lead to more deaths each year than tornadoes and hurricanes, and no community is immune from the risk of flooding. The FY 2024 budget request includes \$3.7 million to modernize our suite of flood insurance products and realigns \$6.9 million within our flood mitigation assistance program to support hiring additional personnel. We are increasing our outreach efforts to enhance the customer service we provide communities.

Finally, I recognize many communities do not have the resources to develop and design mitigation projects. That is why our budget request asks for \$1.1 million to enable us to build on our mitigation grant outreach through a direct technical assistance model that will increase community resilience in highly vulnerable, under-resourced small communities nationwide.

### **Lead Whole of Community in Climate Resilience**

As stated earlier, FEMA is responding to a greater number of, and more complex, disasters. We must put practices in place to stop the repeated cycle of response and recovery. One of the ways we will do this is through greater investment in climate resilience. Our budget request invests \$41.7 million to support the Administration's priorities to mitigate the effects of climate change. While we must be vigilant and prepared to respond when disasters occur, we must equally work together at all levels of government to reduce the risk to individuals and properties from disasters before they occur. To this end, FEMA plans to lead this challenge and continue proactively partnering with our communities through identifying, understanding, and building resilience to the risks we face.

Specifically, FEMA’s request includes an additional \$37.3 million to further our inventory of decision support products that will highlight future flood conditions and support the Federal Flood Risk Management Standard, along with the associated climate-informed activities designed for future flood events. This funding will improve RiskMAP’s ability to continue building community partnerships and supporting long-term hazard mitigation planning activities. These initiatives are designed to prepare communities for future flood conditions by developing risk assessment capabilities.

FEMA’s FY 2024 budget request also includes \$4.3 million that will enable communities to better prepare for disasters. Included in this request is \$2.4 million that will be used for hiring additional staff to improve our ability to share data on future flood risks and that will support our development of risk assessment capabilities for flooding. The request also includes \$1.1 million for implementing a Building Codes Strategy and \$0.8 million for establishing a new Climate Adaptation Office. The funding for the Building Codes Strategy builds on our work in FY 2021-2023, which created the strategy office and aligned building code activity across the Agency. This investment will enable us to hire additional staff to establish a Building Codes Program Office at Headquarters to implement the work previously accomplished. This office’s work aims to achieve a goal of over 50 percent of the nation’s communities to adopt a current code in the next three years. This work will increase hazard-resistant building codes adoption that will directly contribute to superior building performance during disasters.

The budget also proposes funds to stand up a full-time, dedicated policy coordination Climate Adaptation Office, which will holistically integrate climate adaptation initiatives, climate science, data, and perspectives into FEMA operations, programs, and communications. The office will also support national policy and guidance development in close coordination with FEMA programs, partner agencies from the Department of Homeland Security and the White House.

FEMA’s FY 2024 budget request includes \$1.0 billion for the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program that builds on the work we have done in small and large communities alike and reassures our commitment to leading recovery efforts by providing communities with assistance after a catastrophic event. The quicker we recognize the importance of working to reduce the loss of life and property by lessening the impact of disasters, the better off we will be as a nation.

We look forward to partnering with you to implement the President’s Budget for FEMA in the disaster mitigation arena to better assist under-resourced and underserved communities, and to ensure they receive equitable access to mitigation assistance.

### **Promote and Sustain a Ready FEMA and a Prepared Nation**

The FEMA workforce is the Agency’s most valuable asset and represents some of the country’s best equipped and knowledgeable emergency managers. They are prepared to respond at any moment to hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, health emergencies, and other human-induced events, such as train derailments and oil spills. Even as the number and complexity of disasters continue to raise the bar, our incredible team continues to meet and exceed the requirements – we will always be there when the nation calls. The Agency’s

budget includes an increase of \$15.2 million to establish three additional Logistics Staging Management Teams, strategically placed across the United States, to ensure rapid delivery of resources to SLTT partners by prepositioning lifesaving and life-sustaining commodities as close to potentially impacted communities as possible.

Equipping a ready workforce while also providing user-friendly, accessible technology platforms to our external stakeholders requires ensuring our information technology (IT) infrastructure and information security posture are updated and incorporate the latest requirements. In addition to providing food, water, and other critical commodities following a disaster, one of the first things FEMA does is get money into the hands of survivors and communities to help jump start their recovery. To do this, we must ensure our IT systems are upgraded and ready to meet the nation's needs in its darkest hours. As such, our budget request includes \$138.1 million that will address cybersecurity vulnerabilities, gaps in our internal controls, and modernizing the Agency's antiquated IT systems.

The Disaster Relief Fund (DRF) plays a vital function to our nation's readiness posture by providing response and recovery efforts to communities impacted by domestic major disasters and emergencies. In FY 2024, our total request includes an additional \$20.1 billion for the DRF to address immediate needs and recovery for major disasters.

Our FY 2024 budget request includes \$14.1 million that will support enhancements to the Integrated Public Alert and Warning System (IPAWS). IPAWS is the system that provides emergency alert warnings from the President, the National Weather Service, emergency managers, and public safety officials to the public across the country. IPAWS provides life-saving information to the public through mobile phones using wireless emergency alerts, to radio and television through the Emergency Alert System and on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Radio. Additionally, this funding will support the Grants Management Modernization, Enterprise Data and Analytics Modernization Initiative, as well as enhancements of other critical IT systems. FEMA's Enterprise Cloud Services Support includes \$20.7 million in FY 2024. This funding will ensure the FEMA Enterprise Cloud continues to enable and sustain mission essential functions, disaster response and recovery, agency operations, and other mission-related activities that rely on cloud services.

We must ensure that our workforce has a secure, and safe space to conduct mission essential operations. In FY 2024, we are planning for structural and technical improvements at several of our key facilities to be ready for our nation to respond to domestic events. To that end, our budget request includes \$43.6M for facility improvements. This includes \$6.1 million to support regional projects, such as upgrades to the utilities' infrastructure at the Region 6 Headquarters and the lease consolidation at Region 8. FEMA is also planning \$35 million in enhancements to Mt. Weather Emergency Operations Center facilities, a national asset that provides resilient infrastructure, logistics, and medical support along with support personnel for a wide variety of vital government functions. Finally, we requested \$2.5 million to fund the modernization and replacement of the IT infrastructure on the National Emergency Training Center campus, where our nation's emergency managers and firefighters receive world-class training.

Consistent with congressional direction, FEMA is also one of the federal agencies that provides assistance to the migrant population at the southern border, and throughout the country. As part of the Shelter and Services Program (SSP), the FY 2024 budget includes \$83.5 million to provide grant funds to nonprofits and local entities who assist noncitizens released from DHS custody. The Department's FY 2024 budget request also includes \$4.7 billion for a Border Contingency Fund that will provide DHS and its Components the flexibility to provide services when responding to migration surges along the southern border. Further, this designated funding will allow the DHS Components the flexibility to respond immediately to the critical needs of the migrant population through providing transportation, medical support, and other administrative needs.

Just as FEMA must be ready to respond to natural disasters through our preparedness efforts, we must equally be ready and equipped to respond when terrorist attacks occur. Last year, the Congregation Beth Israel synagogue in Colleyville, Texas, experienced a horrific incident of targeted violence, which reminds us that threats to the homeland no longer occur only in high population areas. During my visit to Colleyville, I met with the Rabbi and the Congregants and saw firsthand how this devastating event impacted not only the community but their individual lives as well. They also shared how the funding from the Nonprofit Security Grant Program greatly benefited their efforts to recover and to protect themselves from future attacks. In FY 2024, our budget request includes a \$55.0 million increase in the Nonprofit Security Grant Program. This vital grant supports local communities through target hardening, physical security enhancements, and other activities for nonprofit organizations that are at high risk of terrorist and violent extremist attacks.

The FY 2024 budget request also includes \$50.0 million for establishing a Critical Infrastructure Cybersecurity Grant Program. The number of cyberattacks on schools, hospitals, research institutions, and other organizations are on the rise. Without a secure IT infrastructure, organizations are vulnerable to a cyberattack. In partnership with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), this new competitive grant program will provide private and public water, transportation, and energy providers with federal assistance to implement risk reduction strategies to protect critical infrastructure from cyberattacks. This grant will enable FEMA to support CISA as they collaborate with our SLTT partners to educate them on the advantages of risk reduction strategies to secure IT systems.

### **Closing**

Emergency management is at a critical juncture as we witness tremendous change in the landscape of risk. While our core mission is unchanged, our operating environment continues to evolve and expand. FEMA's FY 2024 budget request is intended to enable the agency to respond to the nation's current needs while preparing for what additional challenges may lie ahead. I look forward to partnering with you as we work together to build a ready FEMA and a more resilient, prepared nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to your questions.